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Subject: Medical Association: 'Safe' Cigarettes Don't Exist

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Medical Association: 'Safe' Cigarettes Don't Exist

By Melissa Schorr

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - An American Medical Association representative spoke out Thursday, disputing claims made by tobacco manufacturers that they have developed less-toxic cigarettes.

"We are very concerned about any ploy to market tobacco products that would make people believe they are having an exposure that's less dangerous than it has been," the AMA's immediate past president, Dr. Randolph D. Smoak, Jr., told Reuters Health.

"People may think, well, I can use this product now because it's safer," Smoak said. "That just brings them into something that is not truly the case, that's the huge danger in it."

Smoak was specifically referring to two new cigarette products: Brown & Williamson's Advance cigarettes and Vector Tobacco's newly released "Omni" brand of cigarettes.

Advance, which says its newly developed "Trionic filter" reduces the cigarette's levels of toxins, is currently being test-marketed in Indianapolis. Omni, which debuted nationwide this week, says its use of a new carbon filter and a catalytic system reduces by 15% to 60% four specific carcinogens--polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), nitrosamines, catechols and organics--that have been identified by medical professionals as especially dangerous.

However, Smoak noted that cigarettes and cigarette smoke contain more than 4,000 chemicals that are harmful, so reducing a few won't have much of an effect. "How much is a 'little bit' less worse than it was?" he asked.

"Vector has been direct in their claims," responded Carrie Bloom, a spokeswoman for Vector Tobacco. "The company has never said this is safe."

"Smoking is hazardous and we do not encourage people to smoke," she told Reuters Health. "While there is no such thing as a safe cigarette, we believe a reduction in recognized carcinogens and toxins is a step in the right direction."

However, Dr. Stanton Glantz, professor of medicine and head of the Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education at the University of California, San Francisco, said that the tobacco companies' research is subject to suppression and misrepresentation based on marketing needs.

"Something published by cigarette companies has no validity to me at all," Glantz said.

"The research on which these claims are made is all done by an industry (that) is notorious for lying. Until there is external validity to these statements, they shouldn't be able to make these claims."

“There's a long history of tobacco companies misrepresenting the dangers of smoking,” he added. “There's concern this is just one more episode in that.”

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